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Request for grant of a patent

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1. Your reference

BQ/PM/P/21999.GB

2. Patent application number

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0229635.8

20 DEC 2002

3. Full name, address and postcode of the or of each applicant (underline all surnames)

IGT-UK LIMITED,
MARGARET STREET,
ASHTON-UNDER-LYNE,
LANCASHIRE.

Patents ADP number (if you know it)

OL7 0QQ.

7612997001

ES

If the applicant is a corporate body, give the country/state of its incorporation

UNITED KINGDOM

4. Title of the invention

ENTERTAINMENT MACHINES

5. Name of your agent (if you have one)

"Address for service" in the United Kingdom to which all correspondence should be sent (including the postcode).

WILSON GUNN M'CAW,
41-51 ROYAL EXCHANGE,
CROSS STREET,
MANCHESTER,
M2 7BD.

Patents ADP number (if you know it)

7153927001

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Country

Priority application number
(if you know it)

Date of filing
(day / month / year)

7. If this application is divided or otherwise derived from an earlier UK application, give the number and the filing date of the earlier application

Number of earlier application

Date of filing
(day / month / year)

8. Is a statement of inventorship and of right to grant of a patent required in support of this request? (Answer 'Yes' if:

YES

a) any applicant named in part 3 is not an inventor, or

b) there is an inventor who is not named as an applicant, or

c) any named applicant is a corporate body.

See note (d))

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Continuation sheets of this form

Description 11

Claim(s)

Abstract

CF

Drawing(s) 3 + 3

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Priority documents

Translations of priority documents

Statement of inventorship and right to grant of a patent (*Patents Form 7/77*)

Request for preliminary examination and search (*Patents Form 9/77*)

Request for substantive examination (*Patents Form 10/77*)

Any other documents
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11. I/We request the grant of a patent on the basis of this application.

Signature *Wilson*

Date 19/12/02

12. Name and daytime telephone number of person to contact in the United Kingdom Mr. B. Quest - 0161-827-9400

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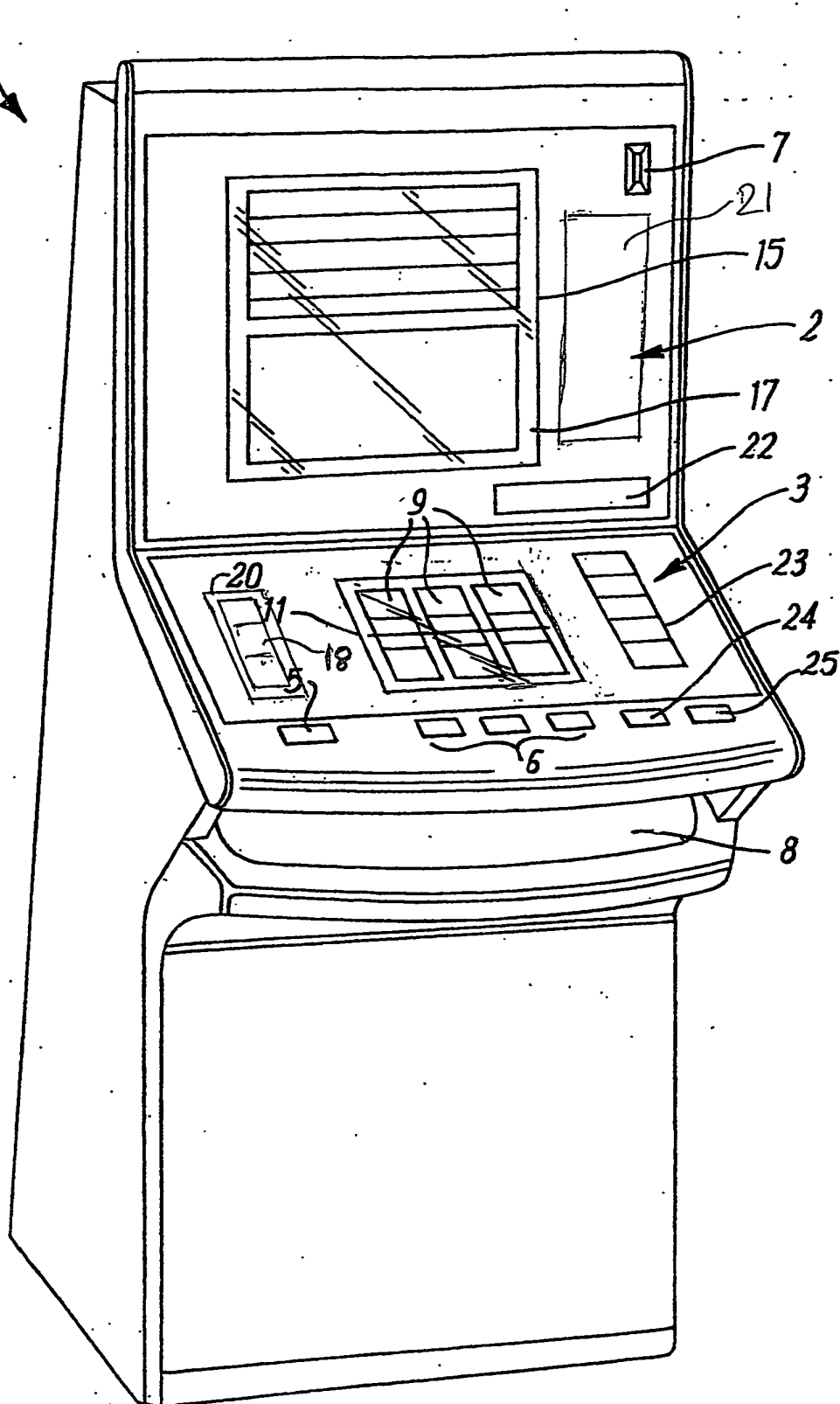


FIG. 1

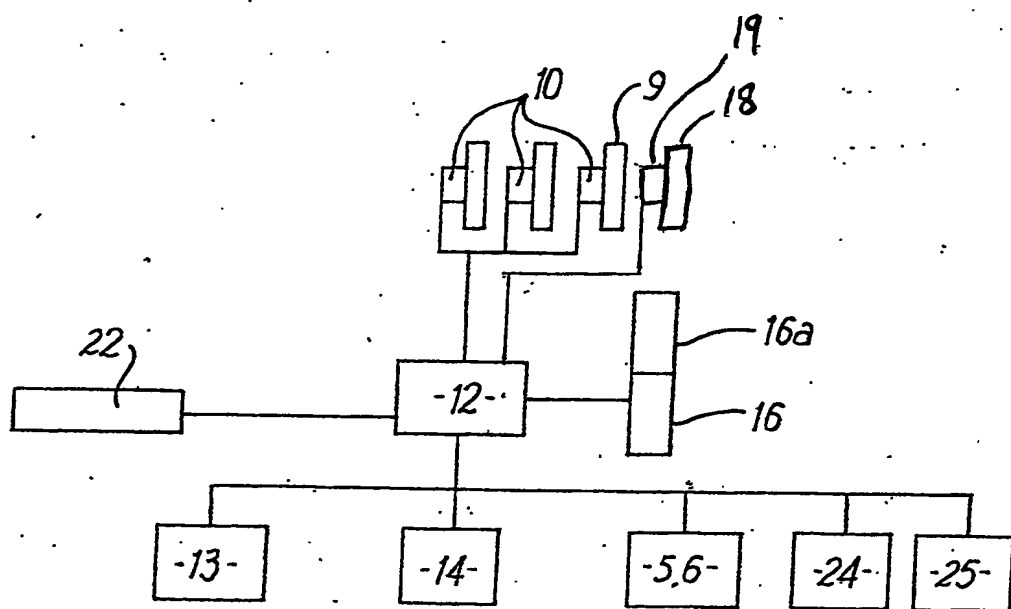
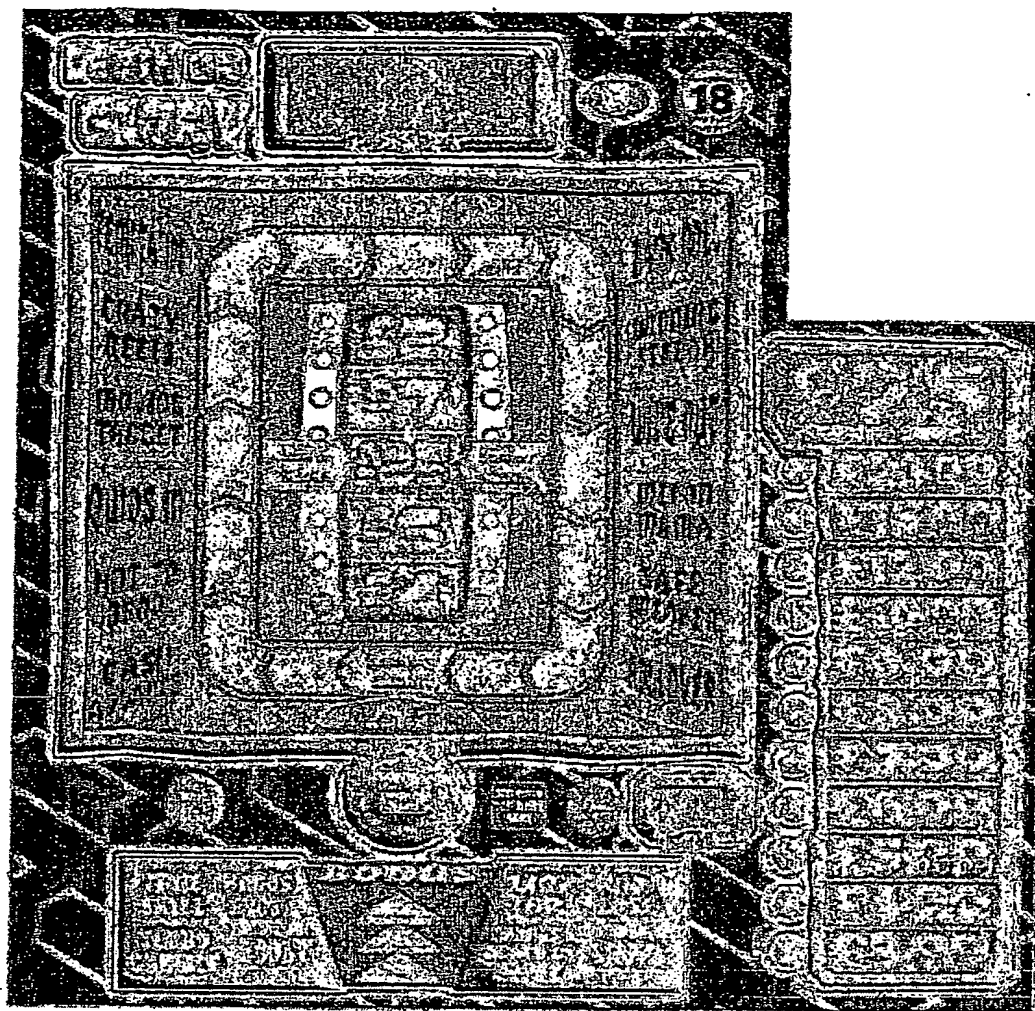
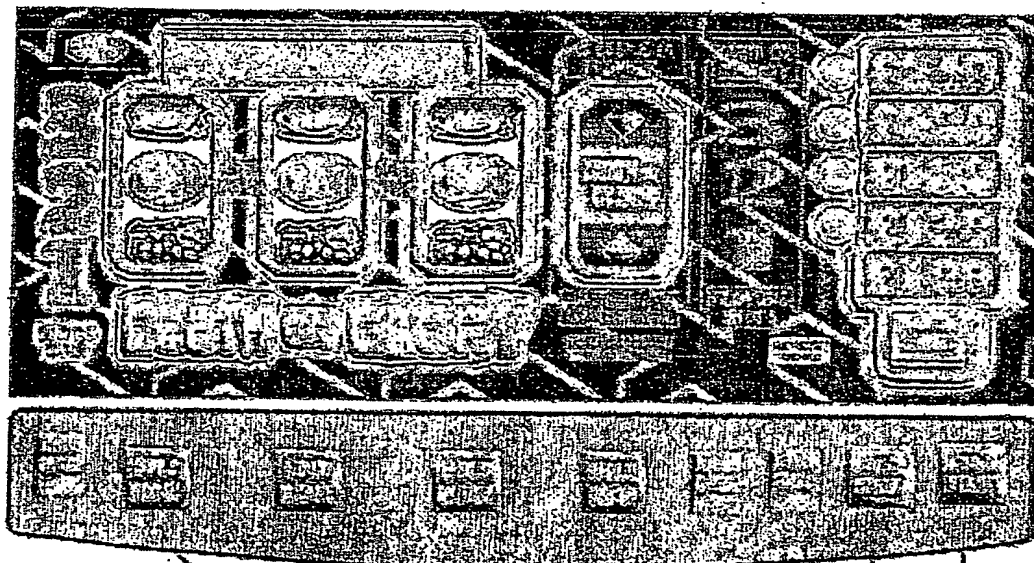


FIG. 2



2

FIG 3



3

ENTERTAINMENT MACHINES

This invention relates to player-operable entertainment machines, particularly coin-operated entertainment machines, which may be amusement with prizes (AWP) machines, such as "fruit" or "poker" machines, of the kind having a main display device operable in play of a main game for displaying a selected combination of symbols at a win zone. As used herein the term coin is intended also to cover tokens, charge or credit cards or any other means of supplying credit or monetary value.

The main display device of a fruit machine may comprise multiple side-by-side reels, say three or four reels, which are rotatable about a common horizontal axis within a housing behind a window at the win zone. Each reel has symbols at equally spaced positions around its periphery and the reels can be brought to rest with one symbol on each reel displayed through the window on one or more win lines.

If the displayed combination of symbols constitutes a predetermined winning combination an award may be made available to the player.

Usually, there is the possibility, on occasions, to hold one or more reels against rotation, or to nudge one or more reels after rotation through one or more steps, whereby a player can seek to influence selection of the symbols displayed on the win line or lines.

It is also well known to provide a supplementary display or 'feature

game' which can be used to enhance the entertainment value of the machine and provide additional or alternative opportunities for winning.

In particular, it is known to provide a panel having sections which can be selectively illuminated to represent movement from location to location along a trail, particularly along a wraparound trail, which may
5 simulate the playing of a board game.

Play is transferred from the main reels to the trail of the feature game on a random or predetermined basis and illumination of the panel sections may then be effected by, or in correspondence with, a rotatable
10 subsidiary feature reel, or otherwise, representing the spin of a reel or roll of a dice or other selection.

Awards or award possibilities may be made available to the player in dependence on the location on the trail to which play has progressed.

These awards may take the form of play features or bonuses which
15 can be used by the player, such as holds or nudges. However, in order to attain these awards play must first transfer to the feature game which typically happens in only a small number of main games whereby entertainment value to the player may be limited.

It is also known to make play features or bonuses available during
20 play of a main game on an occasional, unpredictable basis i.e. not related to any event apparent to the player. However, there may be little or no player anticipation whereby entertainment value to the player may be limited with this feature also.

An object of the present invention is to provide enhanced possibilities for player entertainment associated with the making available of player awards.

5 According to the invention therefore there is provided an entertainment machine having a main display device for use in playing main games involving the selection and display of main symbols which if of a predetermined winning combination results in a main award being made available to the player, characterised by the provision of at least one supplementary display device for use in a play feature involving the
10 selection and display of at least one supplementary indication which if of a predetermined bonus nature results in a bonus award being made available to the player.

With this arrangement enhanced opportunities for player entertainment arise in so far as the player can obtain bonus awards with a
15 feature involving selection and display of indications which can provide a sense of anticipation and heightened involvement for the player.

Availability of the supplementary play feature may occur on all occasions when a main game is available. Alternatively the play feature may be available on only some such occasions as determined
20 automatically on a predictable, random or pseudo random basis, or it may be available under the control or selection of the player. In the latter respect, in one embodiment of the invention where a predetermined credit value has to be established before a main game can be played, there may

be the opportunity of establishing an increased credit value to make the supplementary play feature available. By way of example, a credit value of 25p may be required for play of a main game whereas 30p may allow play of both a main game and the supplementary play feature.

5 Initiation of the supplementary play feature when available may be possible at any stage in correspondence with the occurrence of the associated main game, i.e. before, during or after the main game. Alternatively, initiation may only be possible at a predetermined stage e.g. before or after completion of the main game. Initiation of the
10 supplementary play feature may be transferable to a next main game i.e. such that initiation can occur after the next main game has become available, or such that the (or each) indication selected with the supplementary display device is effective for bonus award determination with the next main game.

15 Initiation of the play feature when available may occur automatically i.e. under control of the machine. Alternatively a player operable initiation control, such as a push button, may be provided to initiate the play feature.

20 With regard to the bonus awards, these may take any suitable form but preferably consist of one or more of:

- i. nudges: whereby the player is awarded one or more nudge steps enabling the player to change one or more selected main game symbols (and/or supplementary play feature indications)

by movement stepwise through a series of such symbols (or indications);

ii. holds: whereby the player is awarded the ability to hold one or more main game symbols (and/or supplementary play feature indications) against subsequent change:

iii. automatic steps: whereby one or more main game symbols are automatically changed to give a new symbol combination e.g. by movement through one or a predetermined number of steps through a series of such symbols, or by movement to a predetermined symbol, for example such as to give a guaranteed win.

iv. free play: whereby the player is awarded one or more free main games.

v. feature transfer: whereby play transfers to a feature, such as a supplementary feature game, or a skill feature whereby the player is given the opportunity of operating a control, such as a press-button, to arrest progression up and/or down a ladder or around a track or otherwise to seek to obtain an award or an enhanced award by arresting progression at a desired position.

vi. wins: whereby an award of a value of credit is made (e.g. £1).

vii. symbol combination win: whereby a winning combination of symbols is automatically selected and displayed with the main display device.

viii. skill stop: whereby the player can intervene to try to cause one main game symbol to be selected e.g. by arresting slow stepping through a series of such symbols, whereupon the (or each) other main game symbol may automatically be selected to give a winning combination with the first symbol.

ix. nearest win: whereby the main display device operates, e.g. by stepping through series of said symbols, to automatically select the nearest winning combination.

Other bonus awards are also possible.

Operation of the supplementary play feature may be such that a bonus award always results. Alternatively and preferably however the arrangement may be such that on at least some occasions no award or a loss may result. Thus at least one said bonus indication may be a no-award or loss or blank indication.

With regard to the main display device this is preferably of the kind having a plurality of series of symbols, say three or four series, whereby symbols from each series are shown to the player in sequence to provide a moving display which stops with one or more selected symbols shown at a win zone e.g. on one or more win lines. Each series of symbols may be provided around the periphery of a respective actual or video-simulated reel rotatable behind a window defining the said win zone. In accordance with conventional practice, provision may be made for initiating rotation of the reels with a player control such as a press button, and the reels

may then rotate before coming to rest for different, e.g. successively longer, periods of time. Also provision may be made for 'holding' and/or 'nudging' the reels with player controls such as press buttons. There may be say 20 or 24 symbols (corresponding to stopping positions) in each series which may constitute pictures of fruit and/or other symbols such as bars, numbers or the like.

With regard to the supplementary display device this may comprise one or more, preferably one, series of bonus indications which may be adapted to provide a moving display, and which may constitute an actual or video-simulated reel which may be associated with one or more player controls to initiate rotation and/or to effect holding and/or nudging, in like manner to the main display device. The (or each) series of bonus indications may comprise any suitable number of indications (corresponding to stopping positions) and these may comprise explanatory words or other indications possibly with one or more blanks.

Most preferably the entertainment machine is an 'amusement with prizes' (AWP) machine particularly of the fruit machine or poker machine kind.

The invention will now be described further by way of example only and with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:-

Figure 1 is a diagrammatic perspective view of one form of an entertainment machine according to the invention;

Figure 2 is a block circuit diagram of the machine; and

Figure 3 is a detailed view to a larger scale of front panels of a practical embodiment of the machine.

Referring to the drawings, Figure 1 shows a fruit machine having a floor-standing box shaped housing 1 having a front wall which includes upper and lower glass panels 2, 3, a number of operating buttons 5, 6, 24, 25, a coin slot 7 and a payout opening 8.

Within the housing 1 there are three axially aligned reels 9 having say 20 symbols at regularly spaced positions around their peripheries. The reels 9 are axially rotatable and are drivably connected to respective stepper motors 10. The reels 9 are arranged behind a window 11 defined by a printed region of the lower glass panel 3. Each reel 9 can be arrested by the respective stepper motor 10 in any of 20 stopping positions in which one symbol is in precise registration with a horizontal win line in the centre of the window 11 and two further symbols are visible above and below the win line.

The stepper motors 10 are connected to a microprocessor-based control unit 12. This unit is also connected to a coin-mechanism 13, a pay-out mechanism 14 and the buttons 5, 6, 24, 25.

There is also a fourth reel 18 having a number of indications at regularly spaced positions around its periphery. This reel has a stepper motor 19 connected to the unit 12 and can be rotated and brought to rest with any one of the indications displayed through a window 20.

In use, the player inserts coins into the coin mechanism 13 through

the slot 7 sufficient to generate credit for one or more games. The amount of credit is shown on an LED or LCD display 22 and the main is actuated so that a main game can now be played. The main game commences after one of the two buttons 24, 25 has been pressed and the reels 9 spin and then come to rest so as to select a combination of symbols displayed on the win line. The displayed symbol combination is assessed by the control unit 12 and a win indication is given in the event that the combination is of a predetermined winning nature.

The control buttons 6 can be used to perform 'hold' or 'nudge' functions, when made available to the player, so that the player can seek to influence the outcome of a game, in conventional manner.

The upper panel 2 is a transparent glass panel and within this there is a printed display region 15, which can be back-illuminated with a bank of lamps 16, and which provides a conventional supplementary feature game.

As shown, this feature game comprises a wraparound trail 17 comprising a series of printed sections marked with decoration, information and symbols.

There is also a jackpot display 21 and a gamble ladder 23 back illuminated with lamps 16a for use in playing jackpot and gamble features.

The two start buttons 24, 25 correspond to two different values of game-playing credit or stake, say 25p for button 24 and 30p for button -

25.

If the available amount of game-playing credit, as indicated on the display 22, is at least equal to 25p, the start button 24 can be used to rotate the reels 9 as described above. At the same time the value shown on the display 22 is decremented by 25p.

If the available amount is at least equal to 30p, if desired the start button 25 can be used. In this case, in addition to rotation of the reels 9, the fourth reel 18 also rotates, before during or after rotation of the reels 9, and the value shown on the display 22 is decremented by 25p.

The fourth reel 18 rotates and comes to rest with one of the indications marked on its periphery shown through the window 20.

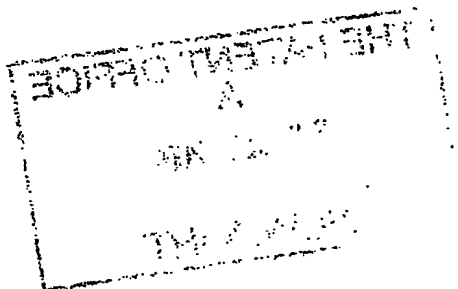
The player can use the button 5 to hold or nudge the reel 18, so as to seek to influence or change the selection of the displayed indication.

The indications marked around the periphery of the reel 18 correspond to bonus awards, which may be some or all of those listed above, with one or more blanks. If a bonus award indication is selected, the corresponding award is made available to the player. If a blank indication is selected the player receives no bonus award.

With this arrangement, in order to obtain bonus awards, instead of having to rely on unexpected events, or on the outcome of the feature game 15 or other features which become available unpredictably, the player can opt to use the fourth reel 18, by increasing the stake value and using the button 25. This gives rise to enhanced entertainment due to a

sense of anticipation and heightened involvement for the player.

It is of course to be understood that the invention is not intended to be restricted to the details of the above embodiment which are described by way of example only. Thus, for example, instead of using
5 different stake values and different start buttons 24, 25, the fourth reel may always be available whenever the main game with the reel 9 can be played. Also, provision may be made for the player to initiate rotation of the reel 18 rather than rotation being initiated automatically.



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